

AUTUMN 2021



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ART AND ANTIQUES FROM AFRICA, OCEANIA AND THE AMERICAS

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AUTUMN 2021

We are pleased to present our Autumn, 2021 online exhibition catalog. Comprising 18 objects from Africa, Oceania and North America, our selection includes an important female Tsonga initiation figure, two very rare Ntwana staffs, a classic Maori basalt hand club and a fine Kusu female figure ritually coated in palm oil. We also are offering a very fine and early excavated Thule male figure as well as a rare Eskimo shaman's mask with a bird emerging from the chin. We hope you enjoy the selection. Please email or call for a price list or with any questions.

Dori & Daniel Rootenberg

NEW YORK CITY, DECEMBER 2021



MASK

BETE, IVORY COAST

19th century

Wood, metal nail

Height: 7 ½ in; Width: 5 ½ in

PROVENANCE

Michael Oliver, New York

The Bete have a highly developed and socially vital tradition of masking and dancing designed to maintain harmonious relations with the forces of nature and the ancestors, upon which the tribe depends for its welfare. While particularly known for the production of *gre*, dramatically abstracted and elaborate masks embodying fearsome nature spirits, Bete carvers also carved a class of more naturalistic human faces, in which the present example is included.

Echoing forms of roundness mark the design of this

nineteenth-century mask, with its domed forehead, wide nose and cheeks, open mouth, and ovular silhouette. With close-set, almond-shaped eyes and mouth held open in an impression of speech or command, this mask holds an aura of vigor and strength. Details on the brow and sides of the mask blend subtly into the dark patina of the wood, smoothed down by time and use. A slight loss is noticeable on the viewer's right side of the mask.







WAR CLUB IN THE FORM OF A RIFLE AND HUMAN HEAD

PEDI OR NORTH SOTHO, SOUTH AFRICA

19th century

Wood

Height: 38 in

PROVENANCE

African Image, Cape Town (acquired in the UK)

Nicholas Maritz Collection

PUBLICATION HISTORY

Relics of War, p 262

Southern African carvers often incorporated a variety of visual elements into their compositions, sometimes in playful and unusual ways. This staff features a prominent human head topping a shaft that resembles a rifle. The whole piece is marked with a heavy geometric effect in its use of simple, solid shapes. The head is cut efficiently from only a few angles, planes, and curves, showing a sharply

concave face and dome-shaped coiffure. Next to the eyes are found twin scarification marks that bear similarity to those engraved below the eyes on the other figural staff in this catalog (also from the Maritz collection), that are attributed to the Ntwana or Pedi. The nose has been repaired.

This is the only known example of a staff carved with these idiosyncratic features, and it may very well be unique.







PATU ONEWA

MAORI PEOPLE, NEW ZEALAND

First half 19th century

Basalt

Length: 14 in; Width: 4 in

PROVENANCE,

Rick Gallagher, New York

Known as *patu onewa*, this paddle-like club is a classic Maori weapon form. Sharing a close likeness to their iconic greenstone counterparts (*mere pounamu*), *patu onewa* are carved of basalt. Carefully smoothed to a narrow plane using natural abrasives, the blade of this hand club could land thrusting blows against an opponent with deadly speed. The small hole near the handsomely elaborated pommel was a typical feature of one-handed Maori weapons, used to secure a wrist cord. The smooth lines and unadorned, charcoal grey surface of this weapon, along with its meticulous manufacture, come together as a strikingly beautiful piece of minimalist stonecraft.







FEMALE HALF FIGURE

KUSU, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

Early 20th century

Wood, palm oil, fibers

Height: 12 ¼ in

PROVENANCE:

Joseph-Leon Christiaens

Marc Leo Felix

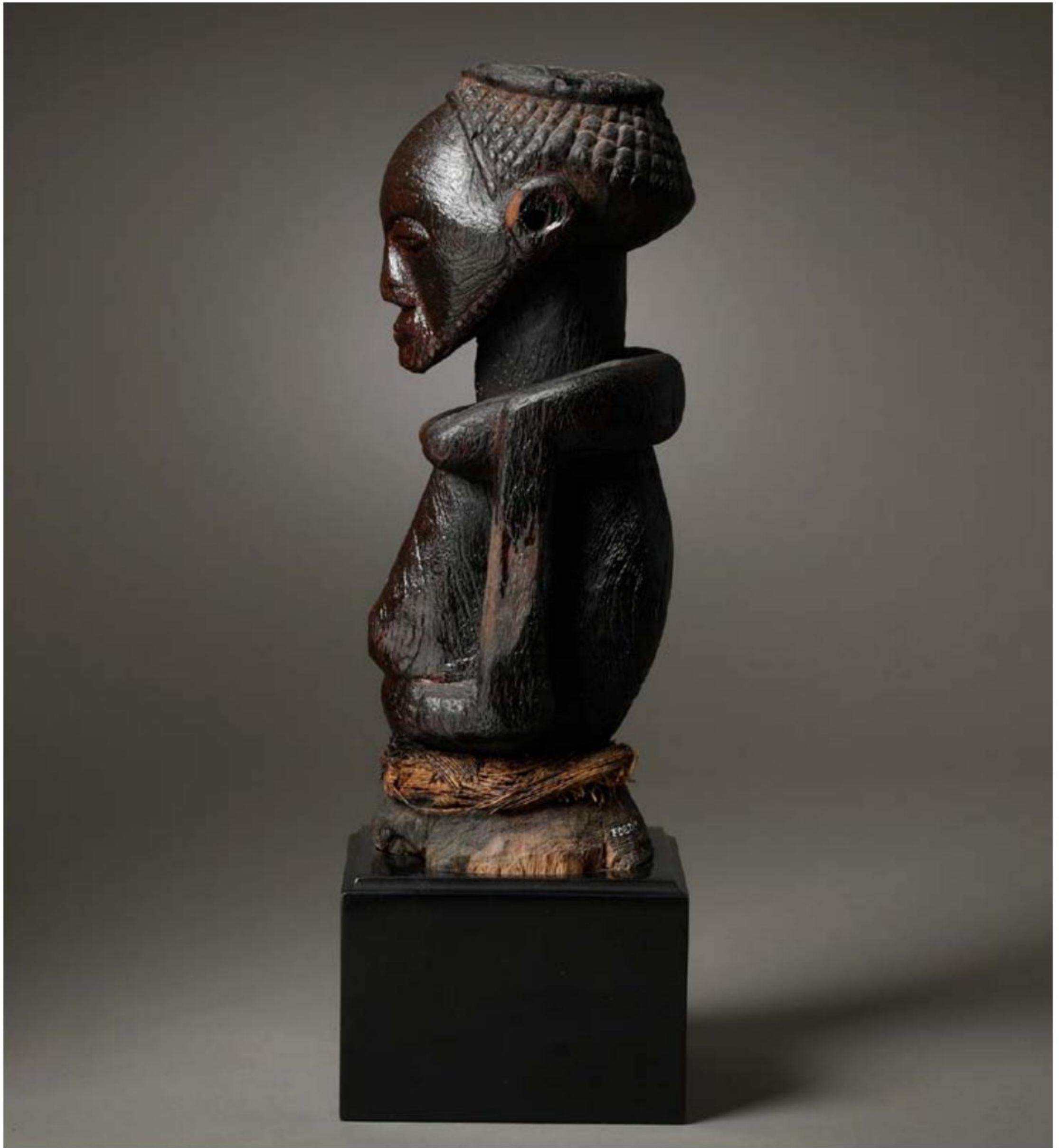
Private Collection, New York (acquired in the 1980s)

Settled on the banks of the Lualaba River, the territory of the Kusu borders those of the Luba and Hemba, whose art traditions and belief systems exerted a significant influence on the Kusu. A class of power figures were produced by Kusu artisans, some janiform and some with a single aspect, such as the present example. Representing ancestral spirits, they were regarded with awe and honored with ritual offerings.

This figure is a fine example of its type, showing a prominent, powerful head, solemn expression and

weighty profile. While the torso and limbs of this figure are highly abstracted, the careful rendering of the face shows more than a hint of naturalism. The rich, sweating patina, resulting from regular ritual applications of palm oil, only heightens that impression. At the top of the head, above a patterned coiffure, is found a cavity filled with a magical charge of organic materials. Prepared by a ritual practitioner, the charge is an all-important substance that activates and empowers the statue to fulfill its magical functions.











STANDING MALE FIGURE

THULE CULTURE, SHISHMAREF OR WALES, ALASKA

Ca AD 1200–1400

Marine ivory

Height: 4 ½ in

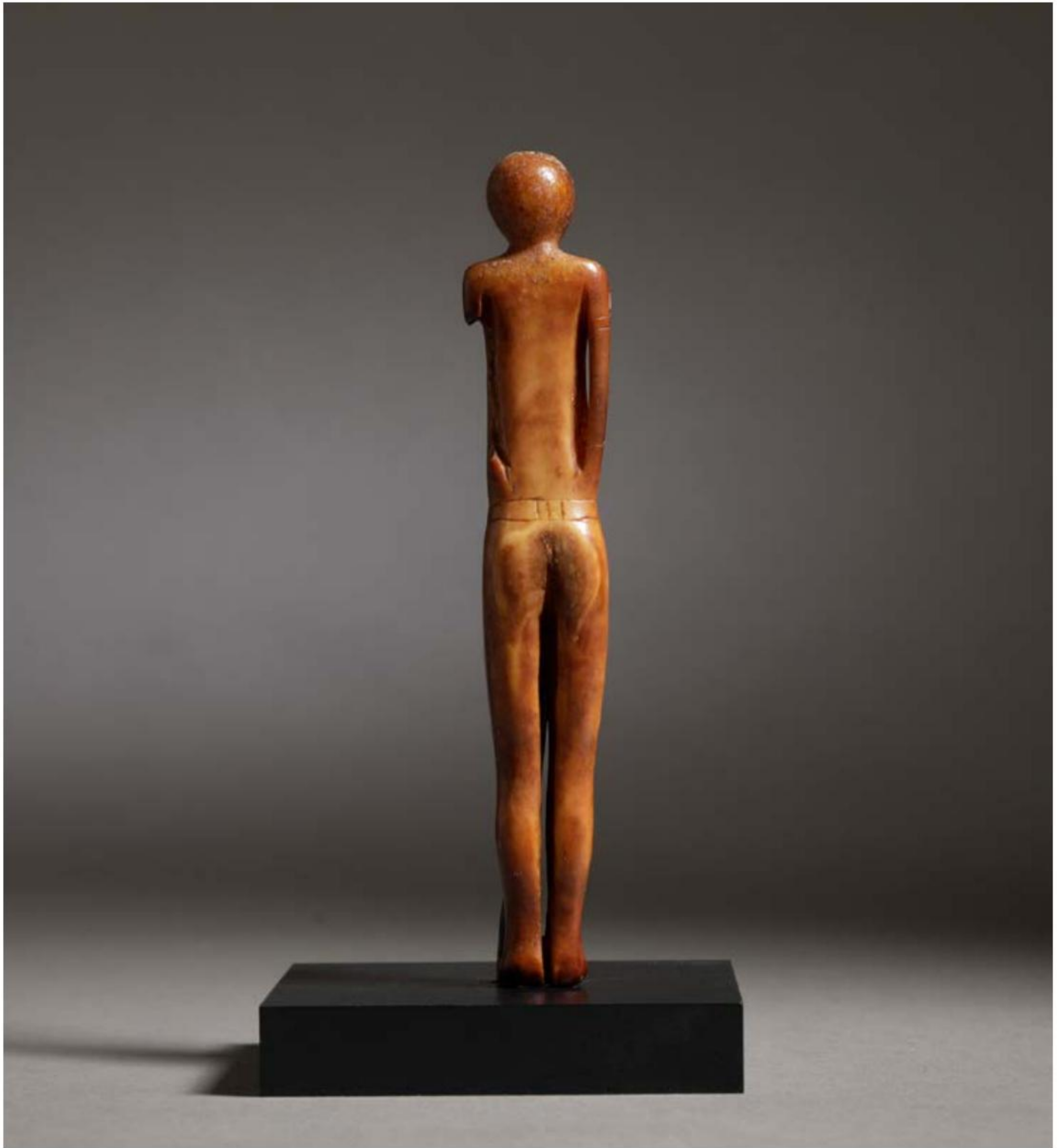
PROVENANCE

Jeffrey Myers, New York

The combined effects of erosion and delicate artistry together lend an otherworldly aspect to this early excavated Thule figurine. That this figure was treasured by those who created and kept it is clearly evident, smoothed as it is from years of frequent handling. Some details, such as the incisions on the torso and waist describing a parka and belt, have been worn to mere suggestions, along with those of the figure's face, which now shows a featureless dome pierced only by two eye holes. The sensitively carved body shows a fair degree of naturalism, though elegantly stylized with thinning to the arms and torso. The figure's hands are fused to the hips, and most of the left arm has been lost.

Figures of this type are an ancient form with a lineage stretching back before recorded history. According to Fitzhugh et Kaplan (*Inua: Spirit World of the Bering Sea Eskimo*, 1982 : 156), they were carved for several purposes: to stand in for people absent from the village during festivals, to avert infertility, or else to focus the attention of animal *inua* (spirits) during the Doll Festival, which was held to bless hunting and fishing expeditions in the coming year. Among the Yup'ik, shamans also used dolls in adulthood initiations and hung them in trees to foretell the location of game. Dolls were also carved by fathers and given to their daughters as playthings.







SHAMAN'S MASK

ESKIMO, ALASKA

Late 19th century

Wood, red-brown and black pigments, feathers (replaced)

Height: (mask only): 6 ½ in; Width 5 ½ in

PROVENANCE

Skinner Auction House, Boston

Jeffrey Myers, New York

In Yup'ik tradition, masks were employed by a shaman (*angalkuq*), the only member of the community with sufficient power to control the spirits of nature. Masks enabled them to communicate with the spirits and understand their needs, and to give recommendations on how to appease them. Guidance from the *angalkuq* often emphasized a carefully observed code of behavior that would preserve a positive relationship with the spirits, upon whose goodwill the life of the community depended.

Inhabiting and suffusing the animistic world of the Yup'ik was a vast population of spirits that lived inside every animal, human, and natural object, as well as in the intangible plane of the "skyland." Collectively these spirits were known as *tuunrat*. A shaman's power could be measured by the number of *tuunrat* over which he held sway. Among these, spirits of the visible, phenomenological world were dubbed *yua*. *Yua* and *tuunrat* were given shape and presented to the community in the form of masks crafted by the *angalkuq*, depicting monstrous visages, animal forms, and human faces, often in striking aggregations and juxtapositions. While the *tuunrat* were

interpreted by some as malicious and capricious, they were largely regarded as an *angalkuq's* helper spirits.

A fundamental aspect of Yup'ik animism was the acceptance of an inherent personhood in all natural beings and forms, which was expressed in the masks. Animals, it was believed, possessed a kind of dual existence, both animal and human, and could take on a human aspect at will by pushing up their muzzle or beak just as a human would a mask.

That equivalence of personhood is seen in the fine mask presented here, in which a bird emerges from the chin of a human face, both identities blended and indivisible. Birds were a powerful symbol for both the hunter and the *angalkuq*, being creatures of the sky, land, and water.

The qualities of this mask place it in a very rare class. Not only are examples with this particular combination of features quite uncommon, the craftsmanship is also notably refined, showing a smooth sculptural quality to the face that contrasts with the rougher wood carving of many Yup'ik masks. The original feathers on this mask have been replaced.







MALE HELMET MASK *LIPICO*

MAKONDE, MOZAMBIQUE

First half 20th century

Wood, hair

Height: 12 in

PROVENANCE

Pace Primitive

James Stephenson Gallery

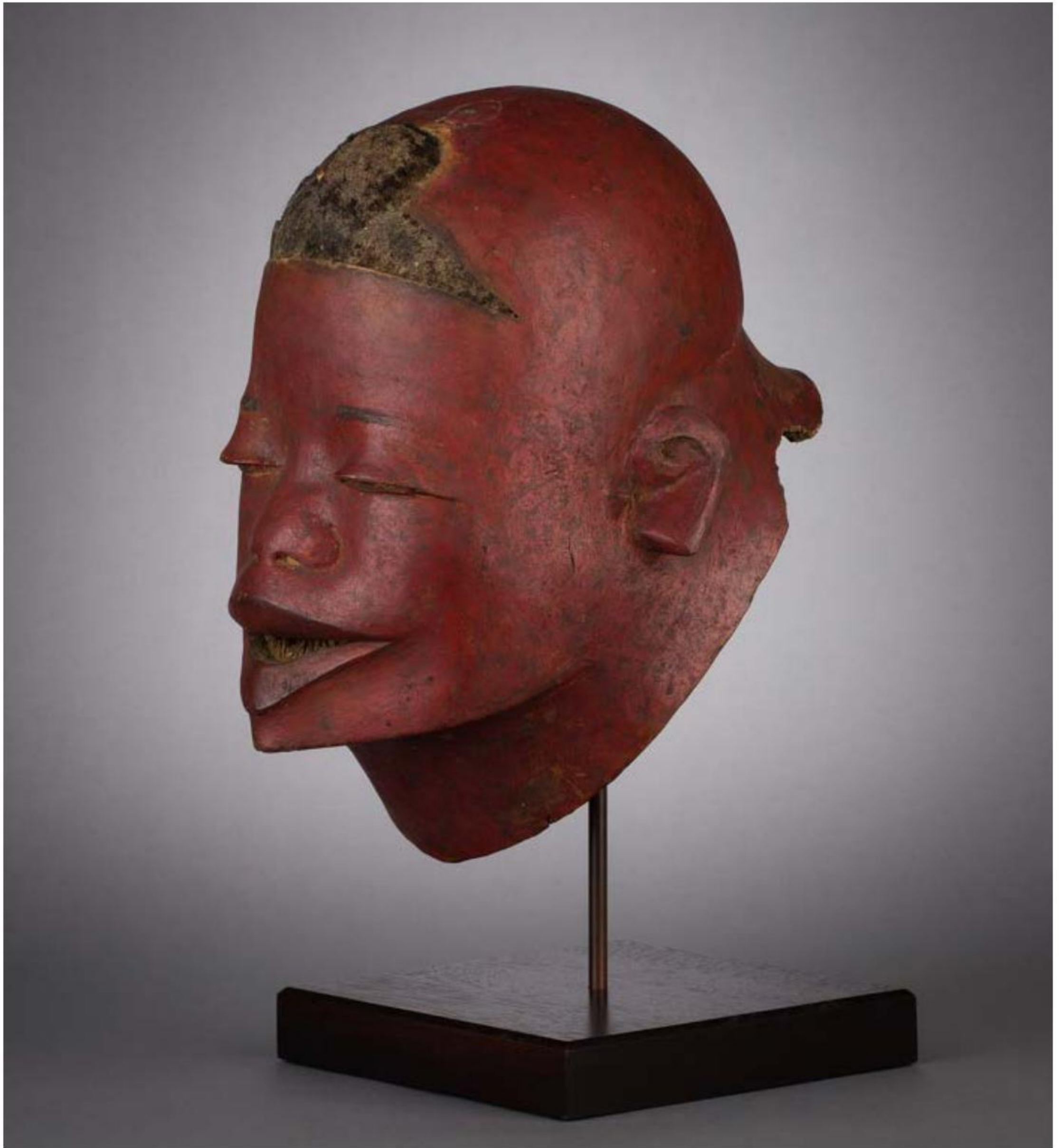
Private Boston collection

Nobel Endicott, New York

With a naturalistically rendered portrait and protruding lower lip terminating close upon the chin, this Makonde helmet mask called *lipico* (plural *mapico*) beautifully displays the hallmarks of its type. The drowsy, entranced expression of the face, so confidently formed in smooth undulations and subtle volumes, seems almost taken from life, and the application of hair above the brow only enhances the effect. A ruddy pigmentation colors the mask over its full surface, which is unmarked by the elaborate scarification designs that often adorn masks of this kind.

Mapico masks are worn for ceremonial dances during the rites of passage of circumcised boys called *mapico* dances. These masks are carved by master craftsmen and are made of a soft wood and often feature human hair.











SISTRUM WITH FEMALE HEAD *WASAMBA*

BAMANA, MALI

Early 20th century

Wood, calabash / gourd, plant fiber, pigments

Height: 21 in; Width: 8 in

PROVENANCE

Private Collection, USA

This sistrum, or ceremonial rattle, is used by shaking the group of stacked, circular gourd disks that run along the length of its downward-curving rod. A stylized woman's head with multi-pointed coiffure tops the painted handle, its face merging with the shaker rod. For the Bamana, sistrums were emblems of the acquisition of knowledge and accompanied the chants and processions of boys being initiated into the *n'tomo* youth society.

There is a slight loss at the tip of one braid on the head-shaped finial.







INITIATION FIGURE OF A WOMAN

TSONGA, SOUTH AFRICA

19th century

Wood

Height: 9 in

PROVENANCE

Ralph Nash (1928-2014)

Josef Herman (1911-2000), Suffolk, UK.

Christie's, Amsterdam, "The Josef Herman Collection of African Art",
12 December 2000. Lot 364.

Kevin Conru, London/Brussels, Belgium, 2000, #KC 176

Private Collection

EXHIBITED

Fagg (William), "Miniature wood carvings of Africa", Bath: Adams & Barth, 1970:103, pl.102

Gillon (Werner), "Collecting African Art", London: Studio Vista and Christie's, 1979:167, fig.212

Expo cat.: "Miniature African Sculptures from the Herman Collection", text by Hermione Waterfield, intro by David Attenborough, London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1985:44, #31

Expo cat: "Africa: The Art of a Continent", Phillips (Tom), editor, Munich/New York: Prestel, 1995:#3.43

Klopper (Sandra), Nel (Karel) & Conru (Kevin), "Art de l'Afrique du Sud-Est de la collection Conru", Milano: 5 Continents, 2002:89 & 194, #32

UK: "Miniature African Sculptures from the Herman Collection":

– Durham: DLI Museum and Art Centre, 11 May-16 June 1985

– Bristol: City of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery, 22 June-27 July 1985

– Swansea: Glynn Vivian Art Gallery and Museum,
3 August-7 September 1985

– Sheffield: Graves Art Gallery, 14 September-20 October 1985

– Coventry: Herbert Art Gallery, 26 October-1 December 1985

London, UK: "Africa: The Art of a Continent", Royal Academy of Arts,
4 October 1995-21 January 1996

Standing at just over nine inches tall, this female figure projects a monumental quality that would surely have enraptured and inspired its previous owner, the great collector and artist Josef Herman, who said this piece remained a favorite all his life. When Herman bought the piece from renowned dealer Ralph Nash in 1971, he exclaimed "How can Ralph not see the power in this piece? He let me have it for only a few hundred pounds and I was willing to pay thousands!" Its massive shoulders, thick legs, oversized feet, and small head all contribute to an aura of solidity and strength. A hint of contrapposto and a slight tilt of the head animate the body, lending a lifelike attitude. Viewed in profile, the varied directionality of the coiffure, breasts, arms, and buttocks forms an angular dialogue. A dark patina graces the figure's smooth surface, inviting bright highlights that emphasize its robust physicality.

A similar figure to the present example, now held in the Museum für Völkerkunde in Vienna, was collected by Adolf Eppler in the 1880s among the "Shangana Kaffirs" (Transvaal Tsonga), giving significant credence to a Tsonga



origin. That figure was part of a male/female pair, such pairs being carved for initiatory use by certain tribes of southern Africa, such as the Sotho and Venda. The Tsonga had extensive connection to these tribes through geographic proximity and periods of vassalage, and this particular style of figure may have been produced by a Tsonga artist for use by a neighboring tribe.

That this figure was made for the indigenous community's use and not for European buyers is clearly indicated by its jutting breasts and sharply delineated pubis. The prominence of these features is common to initiation figures, which served to instruct young women and men in their understanding of reproduction and gender roles. When not actively in use for didactic purposes, the pubic area of the figure would be clothed in a small apron of cloth, leather, or beads.









SPEAR THROWER, WOOMERA

ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, SOUTH WESTERN AUSTRALIA

19th century

Wood, resin, bone

Height: 23 in; Width: 6 in

PROVENANCE

Private Collection, USA

Spear throwers, which serve as an extension of the arm and allow a hunter to hurl a spear with greater force, have been used for millennia by traditional cultures across the globe. In Australia, this tool is known as *woomera*. Aboriginal spear throwers from the southern district of Western Australia, such as the present example, take the form of flat, undecorated, leaf-shaped slips of wood. Attached at one point is a bone peg, which would notch into the base of the spear. At the opposite point is a spinifex resin knob that functions as a grip. The graceful sweep and minimal design of this *woomera* communicate a calm, simple beauty.







FIGURATIVE STAFF OF A WOMAN

PEDI OR NTWANA PEOPLE, SOUTH AFRICA

19th century

Wood, pokerwork

Height: 28 in

PROVENANCE:

Private Collection, UK

Kevin Conru, Brussels

Nicholas Maritz, South Africa

PUBLICATION HISTORY

Relics of War: A Collection of 19th Century Artifacts from British South Africa and Southern Rhodesia, 2008

This very rare and early figural staff belongs to the notable tradition of finely crafted prestige staffs, sticks, and clubs that proliferated across southern Africa. Woodworkers in the region were fond of adorning such objects with human heads and figures, animal likenesses, and inanimate objects from daily life, sometimes combining them in imaginative compositions. This staff features a prominent female figure with a large head, animated expression, and arms held akimbo. The styles of both the coiffure and back apron attribute this staff to the Pedi or Ntwana people.

Pokerwork has been used to mark out the finer details of the figure's face and digits, and to darken the coiffure and garb. The figure's ensemble consists of a decorative collar and a two-paneled skirt, the back panel showing a swallowtail design. Below the figure, a speckled snake twines gracefully up the shaft.







CANOE PROW BOARD TABUYO

MASSIM, TROBRIAND ISLANDS, PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Late 19th/early 20th century

Wood, natural pigments

Length: 12 ½ in; Height: 6 ½ in

PROVENANCE

Private New York collection

The Massim island groups of southeast Papua New Guinea have long practiced the ancient tradition of Kula, an ongoing, ceremonial exchange of valuables between islands both neighboring and distant. This process of exchange centers upon armbands made of conus shells and necklaces of red spondylus shells, for the trade of which rowers launch out into the open ocean in canoes lavished with decorative carvings. The acquisition of Kula treasures is a prestigious and desirable deed, and renowned participants achieve considerable fame and status.

One of the primary decorative elements of the Kula canoe is the splashboard (*lagim*), which stands at the nose of the boat. These represent some of the most iconic and impressive of Massim carvings, cut with mesmerizing curvilinear motifs and imbued with extensive symbolism. Just below the standing splashboard is a secondary prow board (*tabuyo*) that projects perpendicularly from the nose

of the canoe, cutting through the waves. Like the *lagim*, the *tabuyo* is extremely ornate and bears symbolism pertaining to the Kula voyage. The aesthetics of beautifully carved canoes are believed to cast a kind of enchantment over the hosts of the visiting vessel, moving them to surrender their most precious Kula valuables. Highly abstract bird motifs representing sea eagles are prevalent in canoe board carvings and symbolize the keen “hunters” of Kula treasure metaphorically diving to claim their prey.

The *tabuyo* presented here is an excellent example of classic Massim carving style, with swirling, churning designs organized in a dense composition. The incisions delineating each segment of the dark sculptural mass are highlighted with white and red pigments, defining and intensifying the intricate woodwork. An elegant openwork section breaks away from the bulk of the board, emphasizing the piece’s organic asymmetry.







FIGURATIVE SPOON

PROBABLY TAMI ISLANDS, NEW GUINEA

First half 20th century

Wood, pigments

Height: 22 in

PROVENANCE

Rick Gallagher, New York

Decorated with vivid pigments of red and yellow and adorned with a janiform mask finial, this ceremonial spoon was used in conjunction with sago, a starchy food base manufactured from the pith of the tropical sago palm. Sago is a major staple food for the lowland peoples of New Guinea and the Moluccas, where it is called *saksak*, *rabia*, and *sagu*. Sago flour is mixed with water and is eaten as fried cakes or boiled into a thick soup.

In Morobe Province in Papua New Guinea, where the Tami Islands are located, sago also plays a central cultural

role, attested by the artistic quality of this impressive spoon. Relief designs heightened with white pigment are found at the neck and tail, and an openwork section with two opposed, mask-like faces united by a single cap forms the finial. Showing fierce expressions, they hold small arms up to touch beneath their chins. The warm brown of the spoon's aged wood harmonizes beautifully with the red and yellow hues highlighting the masks and handle, imbuing the piece with a sense of heat and vitality.







PANDANUS HEAD WAR CLUB

ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, PROBABLY NEW SOUTH WALES

19th century

Wood

Height: 34 in

PROVENANCE

Joseph Salamanca, California

Aboriginal clubs were designed for a variety of uses; beyond skirmishing and warfare, they were employed in hunting, digging, toolmaking, and ceremonial contexts. They also took a range of forms, from straight, almost featureless shafts to dramatically beaked and curved shapes. Typically used in conjunction with shields in battle, clubs often doubled as throwing weapons and could be deadly if thrown with great accuracy.

Straight clubs, known as *waddy* or *nulla nulla*, can be relatively featureless or studded with nails or other protuberances. The rare example presented here boasts an unusually long, geometrically studded head above a gnarled haft. Erroneously identified as a “pineapple club,” the distinctive form of this weapon is in fact a reference to the pandanus fruit.







BEAKED BATTLE HAMMER *TOTOKIA*

FIJI

First half 19th century

Wood

Height: 34 in; Width in

PROVENANCE

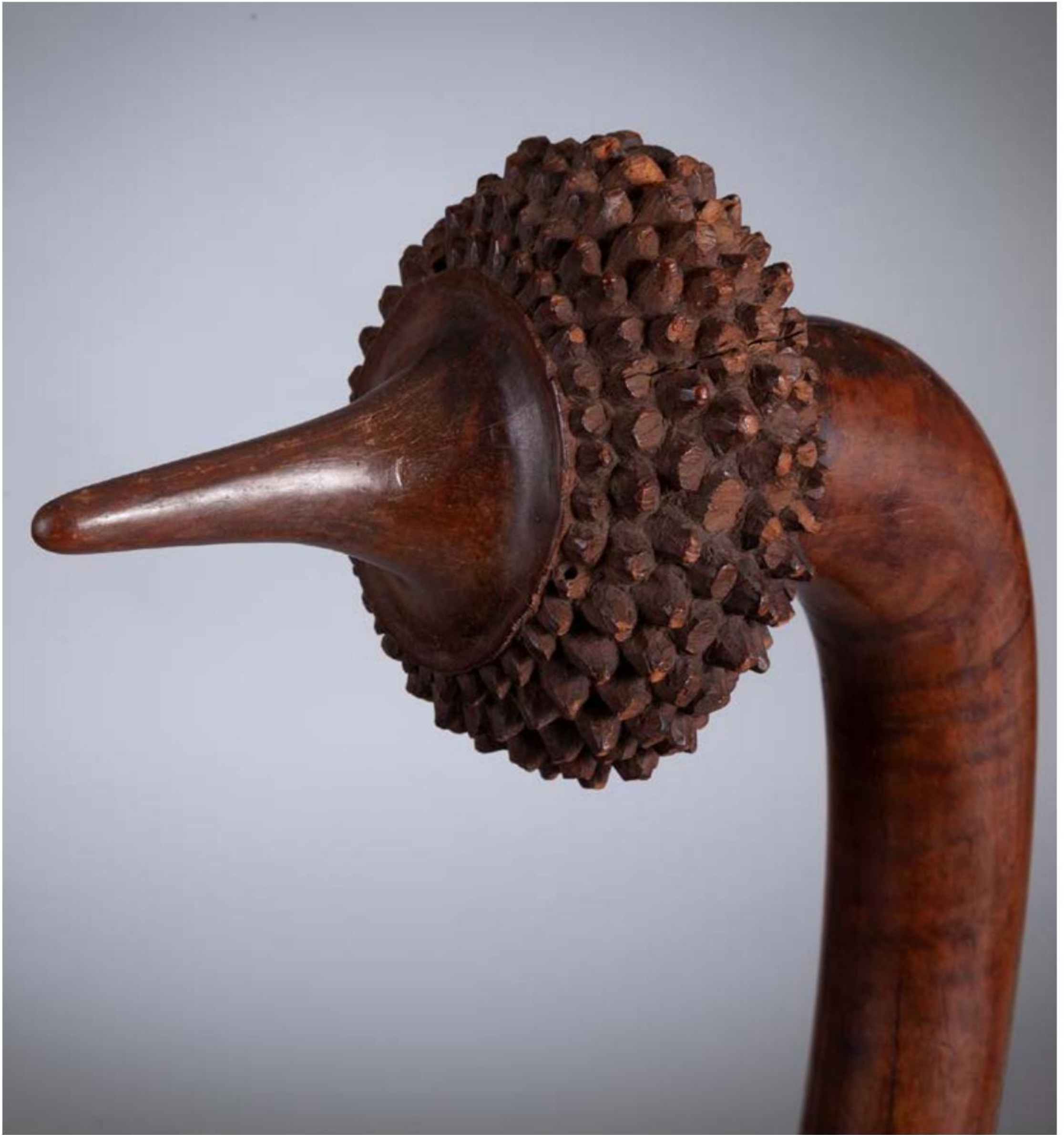
Private Collection, USA

With its hooked shape and fearsome, beaked head, the *totokia* is one of the most distinctive of Polynesian weapons. Carved of hardwood, they offered considerable heft in a fighter's hand and were designed to pierce a skull with ease. *Totokia* were often associated with high-ranking warriors and were sometimes named pieces with their own battle histories.

The unique shape of the weapon's head prompted European collectors to refer to *totokia* as "pineapple clubs," but more informed commentary now links their shape with the pandanus fruit. Some *totokia* were carved along their entire length and were inlaid with teeth or pieces of ivory. This handsome example, largely smooth-bodied, includes a section of incredibly fine incision detailing at the base of the grip, showing a textile-like patchwork of sawtooth bands.

The tip of this club has been restored.







THREE EQUESTRIAN AMULETS *PUTCHU GUINADJI*

KOTOKO PEOPLE, CHAD

Late 19th/early 20th century

Bronze

Height: 1 ½ to 1 ¾ in

PROVENANCE

Jo De Buck

Nobel Endicott, New York

Kotoko metalworkers in the vicinity of Lake Chad used the lost-wax technique to cast small bronze figurines that were kept as personal amulets. Worn around an owner's neck or carried by hand or in a small pouch, they safeguarded their owners against outward threats and inner perils.

Many of these amulets depict horse riders and are known as *putchu guinadj*. These images are deeply rooted in a regional history of horse-mounted warfare that left an indelible impression on the culture of the Kotoko. Their potency as magical and mythological symbols allow them

to quell spirits which cause weakness of soul, sadness, fear, and alienation. They were often hung from necklaces and bracelets along with other items of protection and propitiation, such as cowrie shells, leather gri-gri amulets, and bells.

The trio of figurines presented here show classic forms of animated, vigorous riders in various postures of horsemanship, exuding an outsized personality and charm common to these miniature bronzes.















DRINKING VESSEL

KUBA, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

19th century

Wood, metal

Length: 14 in; Height: 8 in

PROVENANCE

Taylor Dale, Santa Fe

Palm wine horns were objects of high status among the Kuba. As icons of kingly largesse they were accordingly decorative, laboriously carved in low relief with patterns of studs, concentric rings, zigzags, and other geometric motifs. Their sharply angled buffalo horn shape was emblematic of the power of their owners, who often carried them suspended from the belt.

According to Pierre Darteville, the bearer of the horn

offered here would have been identified as a tax collector, and would be given water when he arrived in the village. Its dark surface, worn smooth with use, is decorated with incised concentric rings and zoomorphic motifs composed in a looser manner than many examples of its kind. A similar Kuba horn is illustrated in *Leopoldville-Liège, Liège-Kinshasa. Les collections africaines de l'Université de Liège*, 2007, pp. 85, 87.







HALIBUT HOOK

TLINGIT, NORTHWEST COAST

19th century

Wood, bone, spruce root, cordage

Length: 12 in

PROVENANCE

Kelly Kinzle, Pennsylvania

This is a beautiful, old example of a classic Tlingit halibut hook. It is composed of two pieces of wood, carved separately and lashed together in a V-like configuration. The fisherman deploys the hook with a weight, positioning the more elaborately carved arm downward and the hook-bearing arm floating above, baited with octopus. Beautiful carving in the downward-pointing arm was considered important as it would attract and entice the halibut. This hook's carvings depict a graceful bird head merged with a halibut design laid over the top in relief. Despite the significant age of this piece, the carefully executed features

remain well-defined. Olive green cording around the bone point (replaced) provides a counterpoint to the soft earth tones of the wood. The hook bears the remains of an old label.

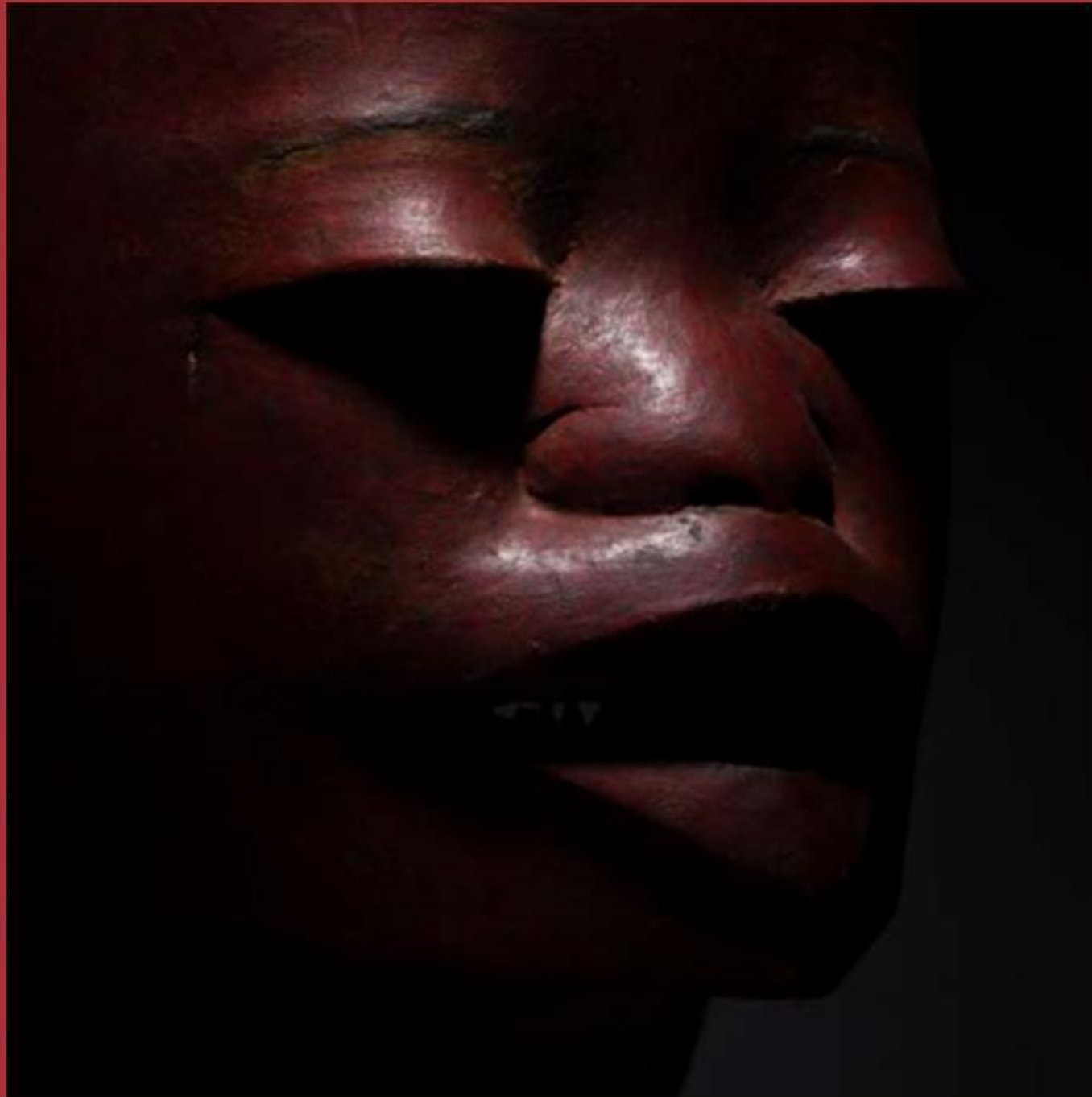
The Tlingit and their neighbors designed these ingenious hooks with a deep understanding of ecological sustainability. Their dimensions and shapes are capable of effectively catching only medium-sized halibut, ensuring future generations by safeguarding both young fish and large, egg-bearing females.





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